

Christmas Cake



1 lb raisins,
2 lb sultanas or golden raisins,
4 oz chopped candied peel,
4oz Glacé cherries halved,
4 tablespoons crystallized ginger
(I use 1 tsp ginger if i can't find it),
6 oz slivered almonds,
1 lb flour
1 tsp salt,
1 tsp ground allspice,
1.5 tsp grated nutmeg,
1 tsp ground cinnamon,
12 oz butter,
14 oz dark brown sugar,
8 large eggs beaten,
1 tablespoon molasses,
5 tablespoons brandy, rum or whiskey

Adapted from a 19th century Christmas cake recipe — the original called for several bushels of flour and 30 eggs — this cake is rich, moist and filled with fruit and nuts. Like other rich fruit cakes, it improves with keeping and should be baked at least 2 to 3 months before Christmas. Before Storing the cake, pierce the top and bottom with a skewer or fine knitting needle and dribble 4 to 5 tablespoons of rum or brandy over both surfaces. Wrap it in aluminium foil and store it in an airtight tin.

Because of the long slow cooking the cake tin must be properly lined. Do this before you start mixing the cake. First, lightly grease the inside of the cake tin and then line it, base and sides, with a double layer of greaseproof or waxed paper. Cut a strip of heavy brown paper one inch wider than the depth of the tin and long enough to fit round the tin twice. Tie the brown paper around the outside of the tin firmly with string. Place a double thickness of brown paper or newspaper on a baking sheet wide enough to hold the cake tin.

Halfway through the cooking time check the cake to make sure that the top is not browning too quickly. If it is, place a piece of aluminium foil over the top of the cake and continue baking for the required time.

Preheat the oven to cool 300°F (Gas Mark 2, 150°C). Prepare the cake tin and baking sheet.

Put the raisins, currants, candied peel, glacé cherries, ginger and almonds into a large bowl and add 4 tablespoons of the flour. Mix well together, making sure all the fruit is lightly covered with flour. Set the bowl aside. Sift the remaining flour, salt, nutmeg, allspice and cinnamon into a medium sized bowl and set aside.

In a large mixing bowl beat the softened butter and sugar together with a wooden spoon until the mixture is smooth and creamy. Pour in half the beaten eggs and stir well to mix. Pour in the remaining beaten eggs and stir until the ingredients are



blended together. Stir in the treacle (molasses) until the mixture is an even brown color.

Gradually add the flour and spice mixture, folding it in with a wooden spoon or spatula. When all the ingredients are well combined, add the fruit, a little at a time, stirring to make sure that no traces of flour can be seen in the fruit. Pour in the rum or brandy.

Spoon the mixture into the prepared cake tin, smoothing it down with a spatula, and make a hollow in the center. This will stop the cake from rising too much in the middle. Place the tin on the lined baking sheet and put it in the oven on the shelf just below the center. Bake for 5 hours.

After 1 hour, lower the temperature to 275°F (Gas Mark 1, 140°C) and bake for another hour. At this stage check the cake and if necessary place the aluminium foil over the top, without removing the cake from the oven. Continue to bake for another 3 hours. To test if the cake is cooked insert a skewer into the center. If it is done, the skewer will come out clean.

When the cake is cooked, take it out of the oven and leave it to cool in the tin for 1 1/2 to 2 hours. Turn the cake out on to a large wire rack and when it is almost cold, remove the greaseproof or waxed paper from the bottom and sides.

Leave the cake on the rack for a least 12 hours before wrapping in aluminium foil and storing.



Janet Elizabeth: Barbara, I didn't think I've tried American fruit cake. We make our Christmas cake usually in September after soaking the dried fruit overnight in rum, brandy or whiskey then when it is baked I "feed it" every week or two with a table spoon of the same liquor used to soak the fruit. A month before Christmas it is covered with almond paste, two weeks later it is covered with royal icing and then folks decorate it just with a ribbon or with a Christmas scene on top!